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ABSTRACT

This document summarizes the major conclusions of 28 reports prepared by PROJECT DESIGN, funded under ESEA Title III, to assess the educational needs of Fresno, California. Highlights of the reports are briefly presented in the following categories: ethnic minority needs, communication problems, clarification of educational objectives, staffing, evaluation, inservice training, curriculum, instructional methodology, vocational education, adult education, guidance-counseling, and finance and facilities. A related document is EA 002 846. (JH)

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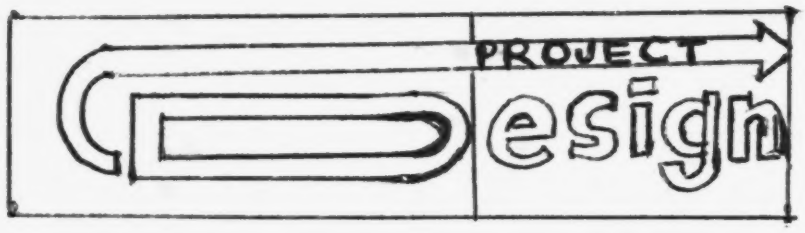

SUMMARY

FRESNO EDUCATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
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Publication 30

INTERAGENCY PLANNING FOR URBAN EDUCATION NEEDS

August 19, 1968

CONCLUSIONS FROM NEEDS ASSESSMENT PUBLICATIONS

For each of the Needs Assessment reports major conclusions were drawn. These, in turn, were classified into twelve major clusters of concerns that cut across the totality of the district's program. The purpose of this report is to summarize major highlights from the multitude of detailed findings in the assessment of educational needs for the entire Fresno community.

I. ETHNIC MINORITY NEEDS

If a single matter of overriding concern exists it must be related to the needs of Fresno's minority groups. Recent national events, pressures by the federal and state government, and stated concerns of teachers and interested community groups emphasize the primacy of this concern for the district. It is not reasonable to consider the problems of ethnic imbalance as solely the responsibility of the schools, but the schools must nonetheless face this problem as one of their major concerns. Three specific Task Force specialists were charged with the assessment of pertinent special needs and virtually all Task Force specialists addressed themselves to this concern. The Needs Assessment pointed out the following factors which must be considered in any solution to the challenge:

1. The minority community feels at present that the Fresno City Unified School District is willing to do more than pay lip service to their specific educational problems; it is important that this depth of concern be maintained.

2. The minority community itself is divided in its attitude toward the question of total integration vs. maintenance of the neighborhood school; a decision that favors either extreme is likely to create considerable opposition (within the minority community itself).

3. Analysis of achievement scores of students in minority schools indicate a consistent and significant difference in performance. Such available tests, particularly those measuring aptitudes, may reflect culture bias and may not be providing realistic assessment.

4. There is a tendency for more experienced teachers to move away from minority schools; the experience level tends to be lower than for the district as a whole. Additional specific training is needed for staff assigned to these schools both in terms of instructional approaches and in understanding of minority group culture. A felt need exists, which has already been expressed to the Board, to increase the number of minority teachers and administrators. One minority consultant expressed concern that qualifications not be lowered in the process.

5. Programs need to be adapted to the specific needs and accomplishment levels of students involved; emphasis needs to be placed on course materials aimed at creating pride in the minority student's culture.

6. Vocational aspects of the program need to be more immediately practical.

7. The present open enrollment policy needs to be re-evaluated in terms of its effects upon both students and schools involved.

8. A felt need exists for increased minority participation in policy making and operation of the schools.

9. Minority groups need to be encouraged by schools to make more use of community services, particularly adult education and health services.

10. All district personnel, not just those assigned to minority schools, need in-service education for better minority group understanding.

II. COMMUNICATIONS

1. There exists a constant thread of concern throughout the Task Force, Speak-Up, and Brainstorm reports, that involvement and communications channels be improved between the various levels of the school administration, and between the school system and the community as a whole, particularly with the minority community.

2. Specific subject matter areas in which there was major concern expressed about communications were: physical education, science, adult education, guidance services, health and special education, and foreign language.

3. Speak-Up sessions indicated a consistent concern of citizens that general and specific goals of the school district be more adequately communicated.

4. Staff groups, as expressed through Brainstorm and Task Force reports, felt a need to be better informed of the totality of the district's activities, to communicate to the rest of the educational establishment their own function or program, and to be increasingly involved in decision making processes.

5. In several cases Task Force specialists stressed the need to employ community resources more profitably in the organization, operation and evaluation of the educational program.

III. CLARIFICATION OF PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

A general district philosophy has been adopted by the board. The statement is quite inclusive in scope and is in keeping with the function of the board as a policy making body.

1. There is a major need to spell-out the district philosophy of education as specific objectives for every program. This process should involve both school staff and the community.

2. These program objectives should be stated in terms of observable, measurable behaviors.

3. Evaluation provisions should be developed for every program.

4. The difficulty of agreement upon objectives should not be underestimated; Speak-Up activities indicated wide differences of citizen opinion as to desirable scope of the educational program. A large group is concerned with emphasis on the 3 R's; others, and often some of the same, are concerned with matters more difficult to measure such as values, attitudes, patriotism, and the social and ethical graces.

In summary, clearly stated objectives determined by total staff with broad community involvement were an expressed concern of the Task Force reports, school staff, and educational leadership. These objectives should be understood by all elements of the school-community, and with particular awareness of and participation from the minority community.

IV. STAFFING

The Needs Assessment indicated the following areas of concern regarding staffing:

1. Job descriptions should be clarified and performance standards should be stated for all district personnel. Roles and responsibilities of administrative personnel, for instance, were stated as being loosely defined.

2. Additional personnel, both certificated and classified, are desirable to provide smaller class sizes generally, and to improve or expand services in the areas of science education, adult education, health services, special education, physical education programs, and supervision for reading programs.

3. The survey of teacher experience and mobility indicates a tendency for movement of experienced teachers away from minority schools.

4. Specialists for minority needs expressed their concern and the concern of minority groups for increasing the number of minority teachers and administrators without lowering qualifications.

5. Staff expressed concern that nonteaching or clerical activities be minimized or eliminated and that the use of teacher aides be increased.

V. EVALUATION

The concern for an on-going evaluative program was expressed in two dimensions; the first pertaining to existing testing programs:

1. Five Task Force specialists expressed a need for improvement of achievement and program assessment in specific subject matter areas of math, reading, language arts, foreign language, and physical education.

2. Included within these comments were concerns that the district and state testing program results be made more accessible, better understood, and hence more useful to the staff.

3. A specific concern was stated by two specialists in the areas of minority needs that tests now being used by the district reflect a culture bias which renders them questionable as predictive instruments.

A second dimension of concern about evaluation expressed almost universally is that an on-going process of program evaluation involving staff, students, and community be established.

VI. IN-SERVICE TRAINING

1. Task Force specialists, teachers, and administrative staff were seriously concerned with a need for an expanded program of teacher in-service training. Newly instituted innovative processes in teaching methodology as well as specific changes in curricular approach such as new math and new English have made retraining of experienced teachers necessary on a massive basis. It was a concern of staff and one specialist in particular that such training be incorporated as an integral part of the job assignment, rather than be considered an after hours obligation. Particular concern was voiced in the area of specific preparatory training for teaching compensatory and remedial students prior to assignment in these areas.

2. Similar unanimity was given the need for appropriate training of classified and administrative personnel.

3. Training needs must be met by the district if higher educational institutions fail to meet specified needs.

4. Human relations training is a need for all district teachers, not just those assigned to minority schools.

VII. CURRICULUM

The two specific curricular areas of vocational education and adult education will be discussed separately in this report. Both were specifically delineated as targets of investigation by the original project proposal, and are deemed of sufficient importance to be discussed separately. Task Force specialists were also employed for such other curricular areas as reading, language, math, science, foreign language, social science, physical education, special education and cultural arts. Within each Task Force report is the analysis of learner needs (achievement deficiencies against a set of given standards) and operational or functional needs required to reduce learning deficiencies.

Certain common themes cut across subject matter fields.

1. Staff, educational leadership, and Task Force specialists expressed a need to provide for curricular flexibility. Grade placement of content and time allocations were mentioned as specific concerns.

2. There was an all-inclusive concern for relevant materials for disadvantaged students and for adult education programs particularly designed for minority groups.

3. Curricular patterns should emphasize the 3 R's, or the communication skills, but be flexible enough to meet the vocational and academic needs of all students. Specific improvement is needed in health education, and added emphasis is needed in socially oriented areas such as human relations, sex education, ethical values and patriotism.

4. Some citizens expressed curricular concerns as a paradox - stressing the primacy of basics, then immediately stressing a variety of other subjects.

5. The twofold need expressed by several specialists was to develop courses of study when they don't exist and to seriously evaluate existing written courses of study.

VIII. INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY

Several teams within the Task Force concerned themselves with instructional methods in the schools; one was given a specific charge to do so. These were the major findings and concerns:

1. An overwhelming majority of classroom time in the district was used in the lecture mode, with a minimum of student-student interaction or student involvement.

2. Students perceived that significant portions of curriculur content as presented were not applicable to "real life" and that they could receive as much information with considerably less lecturing and repetition.

3. Teachers expressed familiarity with and interest in methods other than those being used, particularly those presumed to individualize instruction.

4. Teachers indicated major interest in, concern about, and general approval of current classroom situations in which they were involved, and noticeably less in relation to occurrences outside their classrooms.

5. The meaning of information, once received by students, is likely to be more relevant in student-student interaction and independent study methods, both of which are little used.

6. Flexible schedules, small discussion groups, teachers operating as adult helpers instead of lecturers, independent study, and research centers are techniques of instructional methodology which are most effective in increasing meaning of information received.

7. Motivation toward education as a life-long process is directly related to student choices based on student interests, and there was little evidence of actual consideration of this factor.

8. The district should encourage teachers to develop a strong personal commitment to a sound theoretical position in regard to their teaching so that they can formulate their own comfortable personal style of working with students.

IX. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

1. There was a pervading interest in this topic throughout the assessment. Schools should do more to provide job or career skills and business and industry should cooperate with the schools to bring this about.

2. Students felt that the school is responsible for job and career training; but they were undecided about the relative value of special vocational classes or school-work experience as the most effective method of meeting this need.

3. The Task Force vocational specialist stated that vocational education needs to be viewed as a method of instruction and learning rather than as preparation for specific jobs. He further stated that vocational education should be a part of the program for all students and not just for those identified as non-academic. An emphasis is once more placed on the need for more cooperative planning by schools, individuals, and community agencies or organizations on specific school-community related problems.

4. Of importance is the relevance of vocational education programs for minority students. The Task Force specialist in Negro special needs felt that Negro students need a vocational program that will provide them with sophisticated job skills to meet the current occupational opportunities in the community-at-large as well as the local community (Fresno).

5. Population and employment projections for the next decade in Fresno indicate a likely increase in manufacturing jobs and a slight decline in percentage of those in professional and retail trade areas. These are factors for serious consideration in any long term vocational education plan.

X. ADULT EDUCATION

1. There is satisfaction with the general quality of the current adult education program.

2. The program should be significantly expanded, however, in order to provide more of a variety of course offerings.

The Task Force specialist on adult education reported a definite need for courses in human relations, psychology, human behavior, and family life education; also a further expansion of the program with courses particularly designed for minority groups. Such courses should emphasize consumer, health, civic, cultural, vocational, and leadership education.

3. Adult education facilities should be increased in number and should be located nearer areas of greatest need. More community involvement is needed, especially in the planning, promotion, and teaching processes of the adult education program.

4. Some potential unused sources are available to finance an expanded adult education program.

XI. GUIDANCE-COUNSELING

Seven areas of common concern were emphasized throughout the Needs Assessment.

1. A strong concern was expressed in virtually every aspect of the investigation for the establishment of a comprehensive guidance program in the elementary grades.

2. The need for a shift in emphasis from remedial counseling to preventive counseling was expressed by specialists.

3. Preventive counseling, as viewed by the Task Force investigative team, could and should involve the counselor in considerably more group work than individual student contact.

4. The role of the high school counselor as it now exists is often administrative and clerical in nature. There is a need to organize administrative procedures to allow these necessary functions to be performed but not at the expense of the guidance-counseling function.

5. The vocational guidance program at the secondary level was found by the guidance and vocational specialists, and by the county needs survey to be weak.

6. The philosophy of guidance and counseling services as represented by the Department of Guidance and differs from actual practice in some secondary schools. Operating practice is determined by the school principal.

7. Counselor time tends to be consumed with proportionately few students with special academic or personal problems.

XII. FINANCE AND FACILITIES

It would be inappropriate to ignore the very obvious finance and facility needs of the district in this report since many findings and recommendations have implications in either or both of these areas.

Every Task Force report has mentioned either specific needs for facility or financial support, or has implicit within it the need either for increased financial support or for reorganization to achieve maximum utilization of existing resources.

It must be pointed out, however, that the objective of this first phase has been to assess and determine educational needs rather than to provide for their resolution. Second year activity is directly related to planning for maximum use of all available resources.